

# Metaethics

**The Error Theory:** No moral statements are true. Moral statements are the sort of things that are capable of being true or false. Sometimes people make moral statements that they think are true. But no moral statements are true.

- No true moral statements.  
‘Abortion is wrong’ and ‘Abortion is right’ are both false.
- Like atheism about morality.  
‘God is loving’ and ‘God is hateful’ are false.

**Non-Cognitivism:** No moral statements are true. No moral statements are false. Moral statements are not the sort of things that are capable of being true or false. They aren't real statements. They just serve to express feelings, issue commands and stuff like that.

- Just expressing emotions or issuing commands.  
'Abortion is wrong' = 'Boo for abortion!' or 'Don't have an abortion!'.  
'Abortion is right' = 'Hooray for abortion!' or 'Have an abortion!'.

**Subjectivism:** A moral statement is true for a person if and only if that person sincerely believes that statement is true.

- If someone makes the statement 'Abortion is right' and that person believes it, then abortion is right for that person.
- If someone makes the statement 'Abortion is wrong' and believes it then it is true for that person.
- 'Abortion is right' = 'Abortion is right for me' or 'I believe abortion is right'.
- 'Abortion is wrong' = 'Abortion is wrong for me' or 'I believe abortion is wrong'.

**Relativism:** A moral statement is true for a person if and only if that statement is part of the moral code of that person's society.

- Morality is like the standards of law and etiquette.
- If, according to the moral code of my society, abortion is wrong, then the statement 'Abortion is wrong' is true for me.
- If, according to the moral code of my society, it is good to give to the poor, then 'Giving to the poor is good' is true for my culture.
- These statements are true no matter what I believe.

**Objectivism:** Some moral statements are true and some moral statements are false. Whether or not a moral statement is true or false does not depend on what anybody thinks about it.

- 'Giving to the poor is good' is true and it doesn't matter what anybody thinks about it.
- It is possible for individuals and societies to be mistaken about the truth and falsity of moral statements.
- Moral statements are like statements about science or math or history are supposed to be. They are true. And whether they are true doesn't depend on what anyone thinks.

## **Some Arguments Against Subjectivism**

### **The First Argument from Moral Progress**

1. If subjectivism is true, then Tom became morally perfect just by believing that whatever he does is good.
2. But Tom didn't become morally perfect.
3. So subjectivism is false.



## **The Second Argument from Moral Progress**

- (1) Moral progress is possible.
- (2) If (1), then subjectivism is false.
- (3) So, subjectivism is false.

**Argument Against Subjectivism form Disagreement:**

- (1) If subjectivism is true, then moral disagreement never happens.
- (2) But moral disagreement does happen.
- (3) So, subjectivism is false.

## **The Argument from Moral Error**

- (1) Sometimes an individual has mistaken beliefs about morality.
- (2) If (1), then subjectivism is false.
- (3) So subjectivism is false.

## **Some Arguments Against Objectivism**

### **The Argument from Tolerance**

- (1) If tolerance is valuable, then objectivism is false.
- (2) Tolerance is valuable.
- (3) So, objectivism is false.

## **The Argument From Disagreement Against Objectivism**

- (1) If well-informed, open-minded people intractably disagree about a wide range of claims made in an area of inquiry, then there is strong evidence that claims made about that area of inquiry are not objectively true.
- (2) Well-informed, open-minded people intractably disagree about a wide range of claims made about morality.
- (3) So there is strong evidence that claims made about ethics are not objectively true.

## **The Argument Against Objectivism From Occam's Razor**

- (1) If a hypothesis is not needed to explain any observations, then we are not justified in believing it.
- (2) The hypothesis that moral properties exist is not needed to explain any of our observations.
- (3) Therefore, we are not justified in believing that moral properties exist.

## The Regress Argument

- (1) A moral belief is justified only if (i) the moral belief is self evident or (ii) the moral belief is justified by some other belief.
- (2) There are no self evident moral beliefs.
- (3) If a moral belief is justified by some other belief, then either (i) that other belief is a moral belief or (ii) that other belief is a non-moral belief.
- (4) There are no moral beliefs that are justified by non-moral beliefs.
- (5) There are no moral beliefs that are justified by other moral beliefs.
- (6) So there are no justified moral beliefs.

Self Evident: A belief about some statement is self evident if and only if any person that understands that statement is justified in believing it.

- ‘All bachelors are unmarried men’
- ‘All triangles have three sides’



### **The Argument from Non-Universality**

- (1) If Objectivism is true, then there are universal moral laws.
- (2) But there are no universal moral laws.
- (3) So, Objectivism is false.